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NVC PORTSMOUTH 6392
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SUBJECT: DAMASCUS FRAUD PREVENTION MANAGEMENT REPORT
APRIL-JUNE 2007

REF:

- A) 05 SECSTATE 205073
- B) DAMASCUS 617
- C) DAMASCUS 744
- D) DAMASCUS 765

The following is submitted in response to the Department's request in Ref A.

a. Country Conditions

(SBU) Syria has a centrally planned economy based on commerce, agriculture, oil production, and services. A variety of factors hamper economic growth, including the dominant state role in the economy, a complex bureaucracy, security concerns, corruption, currency restrictions, a lack of modern financial services and communications, and a weak, corrupt legal system. Syrian graduates find few job opportunities because of the controlled economy and slow growth. Subsequently, economic conditions continue to provide fertile ground for fraud as the young unemployed or marginally-employed seek better opportunities in western industrialized countries.

(SBU) Syria's population consists of approximately 18 million Syrians, about 432,000 registered Palestinians, and an estimated 1.4 million Iraqis. However, there are no official records on the actual number of Iraqis living in Syria, and estimates vary widely. In Damascus, the majority of visa applicants are Syrians, Palestinians and a few third-country nationals. However, recently, Post has been experiencing a gradual increase in the number of Iraqi applicants.

(SBU) In Syria, document fraud is relatively unsophisticated and mostly limited to civil documents - birth, marriage, divorce, family extracts, and employment letters. Identity fraud is a serious crime in Syria, and penalties for tampering with civil documents are quite

severe. Given the difficulty of the U.S. relationship with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic (SARG), the consular section has a limited working relationship with police, immigration, airport, and government officials. All requests for police assistance and document verification must go through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) via diplomatic note. Generally it takes from 30 to 90 days to verify a document. Therefore, each case is extremely labor-intensive.

b. NIV Fraud

(SBU) NIV fraud continues to be mainly in the 214(b) area of applicants who have the intention to immigrate, work or conduct permanent business in the U.S. while on B1/B2 visas. Fraudulent documents consist of bank statements, false letters of employment and family books to prove applicants' ties to Syria.

(SBU) Post has seen a recent increase in Iraqi applicants as tourists, students and medical cases. Post has instituted a new policy that all Iraqi documents be reviewed by the FPU if the applicant is going to be issued. Concerns over the authenticity of Iraqi documents and lack of standardization of Iraqi passports are mitigated by the fact that many Iraqis are found ineligible for nonimmigrant visas under 214(b).

(SBU) Most of Post's H-1B visas are issued to Syrian medical doctors willing to work in medically underserved areas. They are highly qualified and there are few problems with these cases.

c. IV Fraud

(SBU) Post continues to be most concerned with sham marriage fraud in fianc (K1) or spouse (K3, CR-1) cases.

(SBU) Recently Post discovered a trend of Syrian men who go to the U.S. and acquire American citizenship through marriage to an American Citizen even though they are still married in Syria. They claim having either (1) divorced their first wife or (2) having had a relationship with her out of wedlock, having had their children born out of wedlock, and not being married to the mother until after divorcing the American wife. According to Syrian civil law if the divorce is not registered, the divorce is not valid. If people have children out of wedlock it is impossible to register them on the family extract without a court order. We are able to verify through their family extracts that the children were born in wedlock and the man had never divorced his first wife. This comes to light when the men file Immigrant Visa petitions for either their first wife and children or just the children. When they claim to have divorced their first wife, a check of the family extract does not support that claim and the majority of divorce certificates investigated were found fraudulent.

(SBU) Post has seen a dramatic increase in Iraqi IV cases, mainly due to the inability of Iraqis to travel to Cairo and Amman. The majority of Iraqi cases are fianc (K1) or spouse (K3, CR-1) cases. Fraud indicators involved in most cases include but are not limited to unreliable documents and limited documentation. Since Iraqis are not living in Syria, they do not generally travel with all of their identity documents and are unable or unwilling to go back to Iraq due to the current environment to get additional identity documents.

Post has instituted a new policy where FPU examines all Iraqi documents before the IV officer conducts the interview. Over the past quarter FPU has identified several bad "S" series passports, one "H" series passport and one "G" series passport and a fake MFA seal. (See ref B.)

(SBU)

d. DV Fraud

(SBU) FPU has not conducted any DV fraud investigations this quarter.

e. ACS and Passport Fraud

(SBU) Post has not had serious cases of passport or CRBA fraud this quarter. We are concerned with the issue of AmCits leaving the US

without a US passport (ref C) and with the increasing trend of Iraqi and Iranians born in the US claiming citizenship as adults for the first time (ref D).

f. Adoption Fraud

(SBU) Post completed its first adoption case under the new Syrian law allowing Catholics to adopt Catholic children - no fraud was detected.

g. Asylum and DHS Benefit Fraud

(SBU) During this quarter, Post has also investigated documents for DHS in connection with naturalization proceedings, adjustment of status, labor certification, and political asylum. Most of the documents proved to be fraudulent, particularly divorce certificates and employment and work experience letters.

h. Cooperation with Host Government Authorities

(SBU) As previously noted, the Embassy has limited liaison ability with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic (SARG). All requests for police assistance and document verification must go through the MFA via diplomatic note. However, the Consular Section maintains regular contacts with counterparts from European and other

Embassies and takes part in regular meetings of the interembassy anti-fraud working group.

i. Areas of Particular Concern

(SBU) No significant concerns to report.

j. Staffing and Training

(SBU) Post implemented a fraud prevention program in 2005. Post's Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU) consists of an officer who shares duties as Deputy Chief of the Consular Section and Fraud Prevention Manager (FPM), and a full-time investigator. The FPM has taken the Fraud Prevention course at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). The FSN investigator has attended the Fraud Prevention training at FSI. Because of the strained relations between the United States and Syria, DHS Athens and the Embassy are limited in their ability to provide resources and training to SARG officials. The e-mail address for the unit is FPMDamascus@state.gov.

(SBU) Post has implemented a regular training program that includes civil and travel documents. This quarter, Post has continued to focus on Iraqi passports and identity cards and has created a reference library of authentic and fraudulent samples.

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